



Do Justice

"Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the August edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

Gangs and justice

The old cry 'tough on crime' and 'tough on gangs' has been heard loud and clear in recent weeks. We have been hearing these clarion calls so regularly for so many years that the question must be asked, "Will 'tough on crime' or 'tough on gangs' actually produce any positive results?" The mere fact that the calls have been so regular must indicate that the results have not been good. An even more important question should also be asked, "Why are there gangs and why is there crime?" The reason for this is that we need to focus on addressing the causes of crime and the reason why gangs were formed in the first place.

Harry Tam, CEO of Hard2Reach, was interviewed by Jack Tame on Q&A on 18 July 2021.¹ Harry Tam is an honorary member of the Mongrel Mob and his company has recently been awarded a large contract to run courses to help gang members give up meth. Jack Tame asked him about the origins of gangs – why did they start and how do they attract young Māori men in particular? Harry Tam's response was that intergenerational poverty was the prime reason. Young Māori from poor families, often violent families, see the gang as a supportive family they never had. So, who is responsible for intergenerational poverty? We, as a society, are. We have neglected the ever-widening inequality in our society, and we have failed to carry out our responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In addition, employers have, and continue to, demand immigrants they can employ cheaply, resulting in more poverty, more crime and more gangs.

New Zealand, per capita, has the second highest percentage of people in prison of all the OECD countries after the USA and about 52 percent of prisoners in NZ are Māori.² Bill English, former National Prime Minister said in 2012 when Finance Minister in the Key National Government that prisons were "*a moral and fiscal failure*"³ and then went on to say we should not build any more prisons.

The underlying causes of crime and gangs are social and economic so, rather than shouting out to 'get tough on crime and gangs', why don't we start to try to address the underlying causes of most crime. We need to ask why young

men, and some women, join the gangs, why do some gang members become drug distributors, why do so many young Māori end up in prison time and time again?

Over 50 years ago, Finland had a growing prison population and regular cries to get tough. Instead, both the media and politicians decided to no longer glamorise and headline crime but to find out the underlying reasons for it. Finland now has one of the lowest prison rates in the world and uses the money that would be spent on catching and incarceration to address social issues instead.⁴

After over 50 years of 'getting tough on crime' is it not now time to start addressing the causes of crime and gangs?

Dirty coal and sustainability

In the middle of July there were headlines about the amount of 'dirty' coal that had been imported from Indonesia in 2020 to keep the Huntly Power Station working when the lakes were low and there were 'technical' problems with natural gas supplies. Over one million tonnes of coal were burnt at Huntly resulting in masses of CO₂ going up into the atmosphere. Not a good look for the Government, and the usual critics blamed the Government's decision to stop issuing licences for oil and gas exploration in 2018.

But this is too easy an explanation for the coal burning at Huntly. When Huntly was originally built in the 1970s it was designed to use coal from the nearby coalfield. Later, each of the four original units were converted to use coal or natural gas as a fuel source and then two additional units were added in 2003 and 2007 that use natural gas. It is the largest power station in New Zealand and was originally designed as a base load station mainly to provide electricity for the greater Auckland region. Over the last 10 years it has been downgraded, providing peak power when there is insufficient capacity from hydro, geothermal, wind and solar sources.⁵ The local coal sources are now uneconomical to use and this is why the power station had to import 'dirty' coal last year and into much of this year.

Genesis Energy Ltd now operates the station. It was originally built and operated by the NZ Electricity Department (NZED), but Genesis came out of the reorganisation of the electricity industry in the 1990s. Genesis Energy was partially privatised in

¹ [Q + A | TVNZ OnDemand](#)

² [List of countries by incarceration rate - Wikipedia](#)

³ [Bill English admits his Government is a 'moral and fiscal failure' — Pundit](#)

⁴ [Crime in Finland - Wikipedia](#)

⁵ [Huntly Power Station - Wikipedia](#)

2014 along with the other electricity generators that were originally NZED.

Genesis Energy, other generating companies, and companies that distribute electricity to consumers are all expected to make a profit and provide shareholders with dividends. The NZ Government owns 52 percent of Genesis shares which should mean that the Government can tell Genesis what to do, but in practice this is not the case as it is the 'market' that appears to determine decisions.

In normal times, well over 70 percent of electricity generated in New Zealand is from renewable sources, mainly hydro, wind and solar but there were times last year when this fell to around 50 percent because of lower lake levels.

The Government has a target of achieving 100 percent renewable electricity generation by 2030.⁶ This means no coal, oil or natural gas being used to generate our electricity by 2030. This makes a lot of sense as wind and solar are now the cheapest source of electricity generation and the cheapest to build. So why have we still got Huntly? And how likely are we to achieve 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030?

The Huntly Power Station cost many millions of dollars to build and expand and when Genesis Energy Ltd was privatised, the shareholders effectively paid the Government for the power station with the expectation that it would continue to generate a profit. If it does not run, it does not generate any profits. This is a big incentive for Genesis to continue running Huntly rather than building the equivalent generating capacity with wind farms or solar panels.

If NZED still existed, the Government could make it clear that they no longer wanted any coal, oil or gas to be used to generate electricity and NZED would plan accordingly. Huntly would not have been expanded using natural gas as a fuel and the power station would probably have been closed.

One of the biggest challenges for increasing solar panels is the negative attitude of the electricity retailers, many of which are owned by generators. Solar panels generate electricity virtually anywhere there is light during the day, but storage is needed at night. Also, when more electricity is generated by solar panels than can be used in that location, it needs to export into the electricity distribution system. With enough solar panels around the country, all the daytime electricity demand could be provided from solar and wind, enabling hydro to be kept for night-time usage alone. The hydroelectric dams are New Zealand's 'battery'. But this is dependent on the electricity retailers paying a fair price for the solar-generated electricity. At present the retailers appear to be actively discouraging solar in homes and businesses. As a national Church we could be a major solar power provider.

The major impediment to achieving 100 percent renewable electricity generation appears to be the privatised generators and retailers, hence the Government needs to look carefully at returning the whole sector to government ownership.

Free for all in space

Since the very earliest days of the space age, it has been governments that decided who and what was shot into space. The first Sputnik, the first person, the first landing on the moon were all orchestrated by national governments. Subsequently, research organisations, universities and communications companies all arranged for various items to be put into orbit, but it was governments that controlled the rockets that put them there.

The first rocket to send a satellite into orbit that was privately owned was in April 1990 when the United States Orbital Sciences Corporation successfully launched a satellite into space. Now there are several corporations which have successfully put satellites into space including from New Zealand with Rocket Lab. Space is no longer the sole property of governments.

Maybe it was inevitable that sooner or later a trip to space would become a commercial activity. If you have enough money and want to spend it going onto space, then a corporation will oblige. After all, that is the free market!

The recent competition between three of the richest people in the world, Sir Richard Branson, Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos to be the first untrained astronaut is bizarre at best, and obscene at worst. And a further five want to follow then.⁷ What benefit is there in these ultra-rich men (yes, they are all men!) going into orbit even for as little as 10 minutes? There is not scientific benefit and they do not add to the communications infrastructure or GPS. The only apparent benefit is to their egos.

This is how disgusting the inequality gap has become. The ultra-rich spend millions on satisfying their egos whilst millions of people around the world go hungry.

Farmers, utes and floods

On 16 July 2021, hundreds of farmers and others drove their tractors and utes down the streets of many of our towns and cities to protest at the Government's plans to require farmers to help clean up rivers and streams, look after their stock in the winter and the so-called ute tax – all initiatives by Government to reduce greenhouse gases in our atmosphere so that we can continue to live on this earth.

The next day the heavens opened, and large parts of the West Coast were flooded when the Buller River burst its banks. Other parts of the South Island were also affected, as well as the Wellington area. These were not the first floods this winter; only a few weeks ago the Ashburton area was severely flooded. Western Canada and the northwest states of the USA have experienced record high temperatures, large parts of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands experienced flooding worse than our West Coast. Then there are forest fires in Australia, the USA, Russia and other places.

Some New Zealand farmers are protesting about addressing some of the causes of climate change. Have they forgotten that for 15 years or so they have been exempted from the Emissions Trading Scheme?

⁶ [100% renewable electricity generation by 2030 - NZ Labour Party](#)

⁷ [8 iconic billionaires who plan to conquer outer space \(cnbc.com\)](#)